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Pressure Builds to Delay Titan's Draft Air Permit

More than 1,100 citizens have emailed state and federal regulators as well as Governor-elect Beverly Perdue, demanding a rigorous environmental review of Titan America's proposed cement plant near Wilmington, NC. Located on the banks of the NE Cape Fear River, the new Titan Cement kiln and mine would be the fourth largest cement plant in the country and a major source of toxic emissions such as mercury and hydrochloric acid.

Citizens were promised a thorough accounting of the impacts on public health and the fragile coastal environment before any permits for the plant were issued. Yet Titan has already negotiated its way out of a required State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review, and is pressuring the North Carolina Division of Air Quality to issue a draft air permit before any environmental studies are complete. Emails from citizens asked the DAQ to delay issuing any draft permit before impacts from the plant were assessed.

"State law demands that the Division of Air Quality evaluate all of the impacts of Titan's proposed cement plant and quarry," said Geoff Gisler, staff attorney, Southern Environmental Law Center. "DAQ must not shirk its responsibility to protect public health by rushing through a draft air permit based on an incomplete analysis."

The Southern Environmental Law Center and the Duke Environmental Law and Policy Clinic (representing the N.C. Coastal Federation and Pender Watch, respectively) have asked DAQ to delay issuing Titan a draft air permit in keeping with legal requirements.

"A project of this magnitude deserves careful and thorough study and public input, especially considering the potential impacts on human health and water resources," said Michelle Nowlin, supervising attorney at the Duke Environmental Law and Policy Clinic. "The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will publish new regulations governing some of the toxic air emissions from cement kilns in the spring. We should be careful about a rush to permit before the new EPA information is available."

In a sign of growing concern that Titan America is trying to skirt a thorough environmental review of its project, an advisory board to the North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission has asked the commission to draft a letter to the Department of Air Quality asking them to delay issuing Titan a draft air permit until the federal Environmental Impact Statement is complete because of concerns over the impact the plant might have on nearby fisheries. The Marine Fisheries Commission will vote on the issue at its January 21-22 meeting in Carolina Beach.

Titan America's coal-burning facility will also produce hundreds of thousands of tons of smog-forming pollutants, as well as known carcinogens, such as benzene, chromium, and particulate matter, a known health hazard. More than 8,000 students in New Hanover and Pender Counties will attend schools within five miles of the plant and mine site.

For more information, go to www.stoptitan.org